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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its first regular session of 2009*

(23 and 26 January 2009)

Addendum

Joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP

A. Population growth and rapid urbanization: food insecurity on the rise in urban settings

1. The President of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP) invited the Deputy Executive Director of WFP to introduce the background paper on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP. The Deputy Executive Director noted the rapid growth of urban areas and the "new face" of poverty, hunger and food insecurity confronting the people living in them. Urban poverty would, increasingly, become a major challenge for development and for attaining the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. He drew the attention of Board members to some broader dimensions indicating that the food crisis and the financial crisis would make it even more difficult to respond to the challenge of urbanization. Of the 1 billion hungry people in the world, many lived in urban areas; response to their needs must be timely. While it was important to ensure a response to urban poverty, hunger and malnutrition, the silent tens of millions in faraway places who did not have a voice could not be forgotten. Food and nutritional assistance could address immediate needs and could be an important engine of growth, which was much needed in the current global economy, where there was a strong economic argument for the dramatic and positive impact on productivity and

* The present report, submitted as an addendum to the report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on its first regular session of 2009, is a summary of the discussions that were held on 23 and 26 January 2009 during the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The text was prepared jointly by the secretariats of those funds and programmes.

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growth of a better-nourished and better-educated population. Last, he pointed out that climate-related disasters compromised health, nutrition and education and that part of the coping mechanisms of those populations affected by climate change was to move to urban areas, some of which might be vulnerable to climate-related events.

2. In concluding, the Deputy Executive Director stressed that Government responses and initiatives must be supported by coordinated action among United Nations organizations, and that there was a need to mobilize a wide coalition of actors — engaging Governments and city administrators, and reaching out to non-governmental and civil society organizations that addressed urban poverty. There was a need for a sharper focus on urbanization and the specific problems faced by the urban hungry and poor, including the challenges created by the fact that urban slums were unregistered, and the high mobility of urban poor people and their limited access to social services. Support from Governments at all levels was needed to build appropriate responses that would ensure food and nutrition security for the urban poor.

3. The Permanent Representative of Tajikistan to the United Nations shared his country's perspectives on how the Government had addressed the issues brought about by the food and energy crisis. He indicated that 72 per cent of the population lived in urban settings and that only 7 per cent of the land was arable. Rising food prices in 2007 had had a negative impact on the poorest people; food import bills tripled and access to food was precarious. He stressed that food security was a priority for the Government, which had addressed the issues not only by producing more food but also by increasing the purchasing power of the poorest people.

4. Many delegations commended the paper and supported the intention of United Nations organizations to work in urban areas, but cautioned against neglecting rural areas and urged ensuring the inclusion of other relevant partners such as the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Programme planning and interventions should be based on vulnerability assessments and should engage all stakeholders among the urban poor, especially women. Furthermore, some delegations indicated that private sector involvement was critical to programme success. A few delegates highlighted the importance of supporting Government responses and initiatives, while ensuring adequate policy preparations at national and subnational levels, and investments in State and municipal capacities.

5. The panellists responded that engaging with the poor in urban areas was rather more difficult than in rural areas because community and kinship ties were not as strong in the former. In addition, factors such as mobility, lack of a voice and the difficulty of organizing communities hampered efforts by the poor to achieve successful and structured engagement. The role of the private sector in production and distribution of food was recognized; particular mention was made of current work with The Bill & Melinda Gates and Rockefeller Foundations and the United Nations to better connect small farmers to markets, against the budget of US$ 1 billion of food purchase in developing countries in 2008.

B. Unstable food prices and the linkage to food and nutrition security

6. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF invited the Executive Director of UNICEF to introduce the background paper on unstable food prices and

the linkage to food and nutrition security and to lead discussions on behalf of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The Executive Director highlighted the continuing challenges created by unstable food prices, especially their role in heightening vulnerabilities in developing countries, as the deteriorating nutritional status of the poor was likely to be further exacerbated by the global economic crisis. She also stressed the importance of close collaboration to combat the effects of unstable food prices and the global economic crisis so as to ensure achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

7. The Coordinator of the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis referred to the coordinated United Nations response mechanisms in place to support Governments in their short- and longer-term actions to: mitigate the impact of unstable food prices; increase agricultural productivity, especially of smallholder farmers; address malnutrition; and strengthen resilient social protection systems, as detailed in the Comprehensive Framework for Action issued in July 2008. WFP had received significant support for scaling up its programmes, but funding still fell far short of the estimated needs for supporting all outcomes of the Framework.

8. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mozambique underscored that country's heavy reliance on food imports and described the coordinated United Nations support for the Government response to rising food prices. This response essentially followed two tracks: (a) enhancing food production and trade; and (b) expanding social action and safety nets for the most vulnerable in the areas of education, nutrition and health. The Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations further elaborated on the Government's response, especially in embarking on an accelerated green revolution, and on the vital services the United Nations organizations were providing in a coordinated manner through the United Nations country team.

9. In the discussions that followed, several delegations expressed concern that the global economic crisis would further erode the purchasing power of the poor, thus increasing the number of people living in poverty who were unable to acquire the foods they needed, resulting in the real possibility that Millennium Development Goal 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) would not be reached.

10. Delegations supported the Comprehensive Framework for Action and stressed the importance of a coordinated United Nations response; they mentioned Mozambique as offering a good case study in this respect, referring also to its commitment to "delivering as one". They also expressed their support for a broader partnership to address food and nutrition insecurity, as would be proposed at the High-level Meeting on Food Security for All, held jointly by the Government of Spain and the United Nations in Madrid on 26 and 27 January 2009 (see A/63/732-E/2009/8). Providing assistance to smallholder farmers was considered vital, given that they could stabilize the local food supply. One specific recommendation was to increase the proportion of official development assistance devoted to actions addressing hunger.

11. A number of delegations recommended an integrated multisectoral response to unstable food prices, as their impact was felt in nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation, and general protection. Women were considered especially vulnerable, especially those heading households, as their capacity to deal with unstable food prices was generally lower; they also often faced the risk of violence,

especially in times of food insecurity. Several delegations stressed the organizations' role in fostering women's empowerment.

12. In response, the panellists indicated that the current instability and the likely worsening conditions due to the global economic crisis should also be seen as offering an opportunity to address deep-seated problems. The United Nations could play a strong role in helping to build national capacities, providing technical assistance and promoting broad partnerships with all stakeholders, including civil society organizations. The example of Mozambique demonstrated how a coordinated United Nations response could effectively support the efforts of the national Government.

13. In terms of providing support to smallholder farmers, the Rome-based organizations were working together with the World Bank to address the challenges faced by those farmers, recognizing that a majority of them were women. Gender was seen as a constant concern in all aspects of the United Nations response.

14. The Executive Director of UNICEF, reiterating that the United Nations system was well coordinated under the leadership of the Secretary-General, emphasized the need for enhancing broader partnership. A life-cy[illegible] approach was considered essential for tackling food and nutrition insecurity and mother and child survival; this included addressing the nutritional needs of pregnant women; promoting exclusive breastfeeding; and ensuring the availability of nutritious complementary foods for infants and young children. An integrated approach was required, given the interaction between disease and malnutrition, and the impact of poor sanitation and hygiene on malnutrition.

15. There was a positive aspect to unstable food prices in that the world had begun to focus on increasing agricultural productivity and the important role of nutrition in health.

C. Harmonization among the United Nations funds and programmes: business practices

16. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA chaired the session on harmonization of business practices among the United Nations funds and programmes. The Executive Director of UNFPA introduced the background paper on behalf of all four organizations, focusing on progress made at the global level with respect to the harmonization of business practices. The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mozambique focused on the achievements and challenges in Mozambique regarding the harmonization of business practices. The Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations gave a presentation underlining the importance that his Government placed on United Nations reform and, in particular, on the simplification and harmonization of business practices.

17. During the discussion, delegations expressed support for and interest in the ongoing work on the harmonization of business practices, including the proposal on business practices. They stressed the need for the entire United Nations system to make progress, taking fully into account existing intergovernmental guidance. Delegations commended the United Nations country team in Mozambique for the progress achieved. A number of delegations called for the United Nations system to

ensure that the ongoing reforms at the country level were matched by similar reforms at the global level and that adequate support was provided to countries.

18. Delegations underlined that cost savings realized through harmonization of business practices at the country level should be transferred to programmes in those countries. Some delegations asked for further clarification on the difference between the work undertaken in the context of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination High-level Committee on Management and that undertaken through the United Nations Development Group.

19. In her response, the Executive Director of UNFPA thanked delegations for their support and guidance. She reiterated the serious commitment of the United Nations system to the harmonization of business practices and to addressing the issues highlighted by Member States. She noted that there was a clear division of labour between the United Nations system, which sought system-wide solutions through the Chief Executives Board and the High-level Committee on Management at the global level, and the United Nations Development Group in its work in support of countries. Lessons learned and issues that needed the attention of the entire system were passed on from the country level, by the United Nations Development Group to the High-level Committee on Management. She also noted that an important part of United Nations reform and coherence must also take place at the level of the governing bodies so that United Nations organizations received the same messages. The Resident Coordinator in Mozambique thanked the delegations for their support and noted that the harmonization of business practices was essential for effective country-level programme delivery. The Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the United Nations closed by noting that the fragmentation of the United Nations system was not an option, since countries needed a strong and coherent United Nations system.

D. Harmonization among the United Nations funds and programmes: programmatic side — Reinforcing State capacity: provision of United Nations support to national capacity development

20. The President of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA invited the Administrator of UNDP to open discussions on national capacity development and the role of the United Nations development system. The Administrator stressed the importance of a coordinated United Nations system in contributing to increased economic activity, the fair distribution of wealth, sustainable environmental management and the engagement of more people in democratic processes: social, environmental and economic sustainability were complementary. He also reiterated that the knowledge possessed by United Nations organizations could help States achieve national development goals.

21. The Administrator went on to discuss the essential role of States in ensuring economic and social development, stability and keeping the peace, and the need to invest in the capacities of leadership and State institutions for this purpose. He emphasized the value of States working as enablers and facilitators between civil society, the private sector and international development partners in respect of advancing national development agendas. The experience of United Nations organizations could play a catalytic role in promoting South-South solutions.

22. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations spoke on behalf of the representative of the Planning Ministry, who was unable to attend. She highlighted recent capacity development achievements in her country, including peaceful elections, post-tsunami rebuilding efforts and early graduation from the International Monetary Fund. She cited the "localizing" of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness through the Jakarta Commitment on Aid for Development Effectiveness, a key framework for Indonesia and its development partners. In this context, the United Nations has actively helped Indonesia strengthen subnational capacity to localize the Millennium Development Goals, provided assistance in addressing capacity issues in national and local institutions implementing the new decentralization policy, and served as intermediary for the sharing of global knowledge and experience in areas such as climate change, local elections and poverty-reduction strategies; Indonesia's capacities were showcased while it learned and gained from the capacities of others. She concluded by thanking the Board for encouraging country-level capacity development initiatives, and the United Nations system for its support in helping meet country needs.

23. Delegations supported the focus on national capacity development as articulated in the triennial comprehensive policy review, 2007. They reiterated that while each organization must establish priorities for capacity-building and capacity development according to its own mandate, it must at the same time be guided by the priorities established by programme countries. One delegation requested the United Nations Development Group to undertake to recognize the differing points of view among development actors on system-wide coherence, suggesting that concepts centred on South-South and triangular cooperation could strengthen harmonized operational activities among United Nations organizations. It requested that the United Nations Development Group determine, through analysis, where harmonization — based on mandates and comparative advantages of each organization — could occur and be effective in producing development results, and report back. Two delegations requested greater innovation and coordination to help countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other national development priorities, while emphasizing the need for continuing reforms. Those delegations encouraged United Nations country teams to prioritize capacity development, and called for the more deliberate use of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework to measure capacity development results. The Board asked for continued dialogue on the issue of reinforcing national capacity development and the role of the United Nations development system in this regard.